

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Theme: European Exploration & Settlement

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Fort Christina

AND/OR COMMON

Fort Christina State Park

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

East Seventh Street and the Christina River

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Wilmington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Delaware

CODE 10

COUNTY

New Castle

CODE

3

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☒ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☒ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of Delaware, Honorable Robert Reed, Acting Director, Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs,

STREET & NUMBER

Hall of Records

CITY, TOWN

Dover

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Delaware

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

New Castle County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

1100 King Street

CITY, TOWN

Wilmington

STATE

Delaware

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT ☐ DETERIORATED
☐ GOOD ☐ RUINS
☐ FAIR ☒ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Fort Christina was constructed by the Swedes under Peter Minuit in the spring of 1638 on the northern bank of the Christina River near its confluence with the Delaware River, on the site of the ancient Delaware Indian village, Hopokahacking. Minuit selected the site for its natural wharf, the stone outcropping called the "Rocks," and for its natural defenses, which the Indians had recognized as well. Located on the rocky termination of the ridge of the watershed dividing the valleys of the Christina and the Brandywine Creek, the site was surrounded by wide marshes, except on the northwest side where it could be approached on a narrow strip of high land, and was thus strategically situated for defense. On the south flowed the Christina River and ships could be moored within a few feet of the Rocks.

Fort Christina was erected partially upon and adjacent to the Rocks, with its south side fronting on the river. It was a square, palisaded earthwork, with acute-angled bastions projecting diagonally at the four corners. The two corners on the riverside, and the one on the northwest were mounted with cannon. Within the fort, two log houses were erected, one of which was probably used as a storage magazine, and the other as a barracks and dwelling. A narrow, wooden wharf or bridge had also been built from the southern wall of the fort, across the exposed part of the Rocks, connecting the work with deep water in the Christina River.

In 1640, under the direction of Governor Ridder, the earthworks were repaired and three new houses, a storehouse, and a barn were constructed within the fort. In 1641-2, settlers began to build their small houses on tobacco plantations outside the fort. In 1647, it was necessary to rebuild the fort entirely.

In 1654-55, Governor Rising had the town of Christina Harbour laid out in back of the fort to the north, and fifteen to twenty houses were constructed on the square blocks of the new town. At the same time Fort Christina was restrengthened and a new palisade was erected around the earthworks.

All these improvements had barely been completed, when the Dutch military and naval force attacked the settlement at Christina. Christina Harbour was burned, and after a bloodless ten-day siege, Rising surrendered to Stuyvesant.

After a period of disuse, Fort Christina was renamed Fort Altena by the Dutch, and was repaired. Following the English conquest in 1664, Fort Altena was allowed to fall into complete disrepair and the last vestiges of Swedish fortifications at the Rocks disappeared.

The old fort site today is enclosed within the boundaries of the Fort Christina State Park, developed and opened by the State of Delaware in 1938. The park, containing about two acres, is in the main a rectangular

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1638

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Upon a ledge of rocks that formed a natural wharf along the Christina River on the present site of Wilmington, Delaware, the first Swedish expedition, commanded by Peter Minuit, landed in late March, 1638 and established Fort Christina, named for the queen of Sweden, the nucleus of New Sweden on the Delaware River. The Rocks and the site of Fort Christina are presently contained within Fort Christina State Park, an enclosed piece of open land on the Christina River.

HISTORY

Although not situated directly on the Delaware River, Fort Christina remained a principal center of Swedish settlement, even during the 10 year rule of Governor Printz from his new capital on Tinicum Island, some 15 miles north on the Delaware. The fort was constructed of palisades and earth in the form of a square, at the four corners of which acute-angled bastions projected diagonally. Cannon were placed in three of these corners and within the enclosure two log houses were erected for the garrison and its supplies. Colonization was at first slow, but by 1641 there were enough Swedish colonists to create a self-sufficient community. The town of Christina Harbor was laid out behind the fort, and by 1655 had over three hundred inhabitants.

When New Sweden fell to the Dutch in the bloodless conquest of 1655, a few New Netherlands soldiers were posted at Christina, renamed Altena by the Dutch. Their relations with the Swedish colonists were amicable and under peaceful occupation Christina fell into disrepair. This neglect was soon remedied by Governor Peter Stuyvesant, who ordered the fort repaired for use as the headquarters of the Dutch West India Company. Despite the Dutch invasion, the settlement of Christina Harbor remained predominantly Swedish. When the Delaware fell to the English in 1664, the King's soldiers garrisoned the fort, but it was the Swedish settlement which remained the heart of the village that spread along the banks of the Christina and became, in the next century, Wilmington.

The site of Fort Christina again became the location for defensive outpost during the Revolution, and again during the War of 1812, when Fort Union was built on the same site.

Today on the site of Fort Christina, enclosed by a state park in 1937, only the Rocks remain, the natural wharf where the Swedish ships, the Kalmar Nyckel and the Grip landed in 1638.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

American Guide Series, Delaware. A Guide to the First State (New York, 1938).
Amandus Johnson, Swedish Settlements on the Delaware: Their History and Relation to the Indians, Dutch and English, 1638-1644 (New York, 1911).
Esther Chilstrom Meixner, Swedish Landmarks in the Delaware Valley (Bridgeport, Pa., 1960)
Roger Yound, "Site of the Swedish Fort Christina, Wilmington, Delaware."

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

2

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

A 1 8 4 5 3 8 6 0 4 3 9 8 5 1 0
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B _____
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C _____

D _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The landmark boundaries consist of the State Park boundaries. They enclose the least-intruded upon land of the original settlement.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

7/21/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L. Street

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ____

STATE ____

LOCAL ____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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area extending southwestward from Seventh Street to the northern bank of the Christina River. At the southwestern corner of the rectangle, a large triangular section diverges toward the west. The north side is enclosed by an iron fence with an ornamental double gateway, the east and west sides are enclosed by high brick walls, and the southern edge of the area abuts the river. A heavy concrete bulkhead extends along the river bank, covering all but a portion of the Rocks, and probably much of the fort site. Within the park are; the Swedish Tercentenary Monument, a representation of the Swedish Colonial vessel, Kalmar Nyckel, surmounting a granite column, which was executed by Carl Milles and dedicated in 1938, as a gift from the people of Sweden to the people of the United States, a small brick maintenance structure, and a log cabin moved to the site, in memorial to James Fenimore Cooper. These three features do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

The land on the east, north, and west sides of the park is occupied by heavy industry.